Young but talented, the varsity baseball team played some of its best baseball late in the season, winning the conference and advancing to the second round of the state playoffs where it lost a tough one to Weddington, 2-1.

The team played a brutal non-conference schedule that included games with Charlotte Christian, Ardrey Kell, South Meck, and East Meck. Facing this tough competition, the squad went through a losing skid in the middle of the season, but a spring break trip to Virginia to play Patrick Henry High School energized the team’s offense and led to a run of excellent baseball down the stretch.

In two games in Virginia the Cougars scored 30 runs, as the offense began heating up and performing to expectations. Also, the trip helped the team grow closer as a unit, something that was beneficial for the remainder of the season.

“The trip was really fun, and was a good bonding experience. Staying in a hotel as a team is always awesome, and so were the stops for meals at Bojangles,” said junior outfielder Christian Schwartz.

After the trip the team won five of its next seven games, including an 8-0 victory over Olympic that clinched the conference championship. Juniors Jacob Bonen-Clark and Tyler Jensen led the way in this one with Bonen-Clark pitching a complete game shutout and Jensen driving in four runs.

Posting a 15-8 record in the regular season, the Cougars earned a first-round home playoff game against Cox Mill High School. The offense put up 12 runs and pitchers Bonen-Clark and Jordan Accetta combined for 12 strikeouts to help the Cougars advance to a second round matchup with Weddington. Accetta pitched well against Weddington, allowing only 2 runs while striking out five, but Catholic ran into some stellar pitching from Weddington and lost the game by just one run.

The team was led all year by senior second basemen Eddie Hull, a Wingate commit and member of the varsity squad since his sophomore season. Hull, along with seniors Michael Crowley and Jack Brodowicz, anchored a team that had 11 juniors with no prior varsity experience. Hull had a batting average of .451 and was among the team leaders in runs batted in and extra base hits. Jensen, in his first varsity season, had an average near .400 and led the team in RBI. Juniors Chase Arnold, Chris Clare, Jeff Ciesielski, and Christian Schwartz were all productive hitters for the Cougars this season, and look forward to returning next season to try to build on this year’s success.

Bonen-Clark and Accetta led the pitching staff to an impressive season, and seniors Scott Singletary, Russell Bottrill, Patrick O’Brien, and Nick Ilario gave Coach Belk the depth he needed as the season went on.

Although the team came up short of a state championship, next year’s team will be laden with seniors who gained valuable experience this year and showed that they can perform at a high level against varsity competition. JV standouts Blake Hilgen, Harrison Seay, and Jonathon Koletic appear ready to step up and contribute next year, and with so much talent returning the Cougar baseball program seems geared up for a successful season next year.